



NEUTRAL ATHLETE PARTICIPATION POLICY

Russian and Belarusian Athletes

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1. Purpose

The European Pickleball Federation (“EPF”) recognises the principle that individual athletes should, where legally and practically possible, be permitted to participate in international sporting competition without being deemed to represent a suspended, excluded or otherwise ineligible national federation.

Accordingly, athletes whose sporting nationality would otherwise be Russia or Belarus may participate in eligible EPF individual competitions solely as Neutral Athletes, subject to the conditions contained in this Policy.

Participation as a Neutral Athlete is participation in an individual personal capacity and shall not constitute representation of Russia, Belarus, the Russian or Belarusian national federation, or any state or governmental organisation.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to:

- players;
- coaches;
- managers;
- support personnel;
- accredited officials accompanying Neutral Athletes; and
- any other accredited person forming part of a Neutral Athlete's delegation.

For the purposes of tournament administration, the designation:

NEU – Neutral Athlete

shall be used.

EPF shall not use RUS, BLR, the Russian or Belarusian flag, or any equivalent national designation in

3. Eligibility to Participate

A Russian or Belarusian athlete may participate in an EPF individual competition provided that:

1. the athlete enters and competes exclusively in an individual capacity;
2. the athlete signs the EPF Neutral Athlete Declaration;
3. the athlete complies with this Policy throughout the event;

4. participation is lawful under applicable sanctions, immigration, visa and host-country requirements; and
5. the athlete is otherwise eligible under the normal EPF competition regulations.

Neutral Athletes shall be subject to exactly the same sporting qualification, ranking, entry, anti-doping, safeguarding, disciplinary and competition requirements as other players.

4. Neutral Athlete Declaration

As a condition of entry, each affected athlete shall sign a declaration confirming that:

- they will participate solely as a Neutral Athlete;
 - they will not represent Russia or Belarus during the competition;
 - they will not display Russian or Belarusian national flags, emblems, insignia or other national identification at the event;
 - they will not use the competition or EPF-controlled media to express support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine;
 - they will not display military, war-related or equivalent political symbols associated with that conflict; and
 - they are not receiving funding or sponsorship from the Russian or Belarusian state, or a state-controlled entity, specifically in connection with their participation in the EPF event.
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5. Clothing

Permitted

Neutral Athletes may wear:

- ordinary sports clothing;
- clothing in any normal colour permitted by the tournament;
- normal manufacturer branding;
- normal commercial sponsorship logos permitted under EPF rules;
- their personal name;
- club branding which does not amount to Russian or Belarusian national representation; and
- normal non-national personal or commercial logos.

Prohibited

Clothing must not contain:

- the Russian or Belarusian flag;
 - the Russian or Belarusian coat of arms;
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- Russia, Russian Federation, Belarus or equivalent wording identifying the player as representing that country;
- RUS, BLR or equivalent national sporting abbreviations;
- logos or insignia of the Russian or Belarusian national pickleball federation;
- Olympic/NOC emblems representing Russia or Belarus;
- national-team uniforms;
- flag-patterned clothing intended to represent Russia or Belarus;
- state or military insignia;
- symbols associated with support for the war in Ukraine; or
- state-controlled sponsorship prohibited under Section 4.

The use of the colours red, white or blue individually, or in ordinary commercial designs, shall not by itself constitute a breach. The question is whether the clothing reasonably represents or identifies Russia or Belarus.

The Russian language or Cyrillic script shall not by itself constitute a prohibited national symbol.

6. Paddles, Bags & Equipment

The same restrictions apply to:

- paddles;
- paddle covers;
- bags;
- towels;
- caps;
- headbands;
- wristbands;
- footwear;
- water bottles;
- warm-up clothing;
- jackets;
- tracksuits;
- medical supports where practicable; and
- any other equipment visibly used within the competition venue.

A manufacturer's normal commercial branding remains permitted.

Where a prohibited symbol can reasonably be removed or completely covered, the player shall be given the opportunity to do so before entering the court.

7. Accreditation

Neutral Athlete accreditation shall display:

Player Name
NEU – Neutral Athlete

or simply:

Player Name
Neutral Athlete

Accreditation must not display:

- a Russian or Belarusian flag;
- RUS;
- BLR;
- Russia;
- Belarus;
- the relevant national federation logo; or
- any other national symbol.

EPF may privately record a person's nationality, passport information and citizenship where required for identification, safeguarding, insurance, visa, anti-doping or legal purposes.

Such administrative information does not have to appear on public-facing accreditation.

8. Tournament Entry Lists

Public entry lists shall display the athlete as:

Anna Example – NEU

or:

Anna Example – Neutral Athlete

Where a tournament system requires a country code, EPF shall use:

NEU

and shall associate no national flag with that code.

The player shall not appear publicly as:

Anna Example – Russia
Anna Example – RUS ru

or any equivalent designation

9. Draws and Order of Play

Draw sheets, brackets, schedules and order-of-play documentation shall use:

Player Name (NEU)

or the player's name without a national designation.

They shall not use:

- RUS;
 - BLR;
 - Russian or Belarusian flags; or
 - Russian or Belarusian federation logos.
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10. Scoreboards & Live Scoring

Electronic and physical scoreboards shall show:

Player Name

and, where a country/designation field is normally displayed:

NEU

No Russian or Belarusian flag shall be shown.

No Russian or Belarusian national federation logo shall be shown.

The same requirement applies to:

- live-scoring websites;
 - mobile applications;
 - streaming graphics;
 - television graphics;
 - match statistics;
 - results displays and
 - tournament-management software.
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11. Public Address Announcements

Neutral Athletes shall be introduced by name.

For example:

“Please welcome Anna Example.”

or, where nationality/status is normally announced:

“Please welcome Neutral Athlete Anna Example.”

They shall not be introduced as:

“Representing Russia...”

or:

“Representing Belarus...”

12. Official EPF Website and Social Media

EPF-controlled websites, press releases, social media posts, tournament graphics and promotional material shall not portray Neutral Athletes as representing Russia or Belarus.

Where nationality is normally shown, the designation Neutral Athlete or NEU shall be substituted.

Nothing prevents EPF from referring factually to an athlete's citizenship or background where genuinely necessary in journalistic or biographical material, provided that such reference does not portray the athlete as representing Russia or Belarus in the competition.

13. Podium and Medal Ceremonies

A Neutral Athlete remains fully entitled to:

- win the competition;
 - receive the same medal, trophy and prize money;
 - stand in the normal finishing position on the podium;
 - be photographed with other medal winners; and
 - have their individual achievement fully recognised.
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However:

- no Russian or Belarusian flag shall be raised or displayed;
- no Russian or Belarusian anthem shall be played;
- no Russian or Belarusian national federation emblem shall be displayed;
- the athlete shall not wear or carry a Russian or Belarusian flag on the podium;
- the athlete shall not wear national-team clothing during the ceremony; and
- the result shall not be presented as a medal or championship victory for Russia or Belarus.

Where flags are normally displayed during medal ceremonies, EPF may display:

the EPF flag or a neutral EPF-approved event flag

for the Neutral Athlete.

No substitute anthem is required.

14. Results and Medal Tables

The athlete's result shall be recorded against the individual.

For example:

Gold – Anna Example (NEU)

It shall not be recorded as:

Gold – Russia

Any EPF country medal table or national ranking table shall exclude Neutral Athlete results from Russia's or Belarus's national totals.

The individual result and title shall nevertheless remain fully valid.

15. Doubles Competition

Neutral Athletes may participate in ordinary individual doubles competition.

A Neutral Athlete may:

- partner another Neutral Athlete; or
- partner an athlete representing another eligible country,

provided that the partnership is an individually entered pair rather than a Russian or Belarusian national team.

The pair shall not be identified as representing Russia or Belarus.

16. National Team Competitions

Neutral Athletes status applies to individual competition.

Russia and Belarus shall not enter a team in an EPF competition that is expressly contested between national federations or national representative teams while the relevant national federation is suspended or otherwise ineligible for EPF international team competition.

Accordingly, an entry such as:

Russia v England

would not be permitted under the Neutral Athlete model.

This does not prevent an affected player from competing in a club, franchise, doubles or other team-format competition where the team does not constitute a Russian or Belarusian national representative team.

17. Coaches and Support Personnel

Accredited coaches, managers and support personnel accompanying Neutral Athletes shall comply with the same requirements concerning:

- clothing;
 - accreditation;
 - flags;
 - national federation logos;
 - national insignia;
 - political or military symbols; and
 - prohibited state sponsorship.
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18. Flags & National Symbols at the Venue

Russian and Belarusian national flags, national federation flags and equivalent state symbols shall not be displayed by Neutral Athletes or their accredited support personnel within EPF-controlled competition areas.

EPF may additionally prohibit spectators from bringing or displaying Russian or Belarusian national flags, state insignia or associated political or military imagery within the official competition venue where this is considered necessary to preserve the neutral status of the event.

Any such spectator restriction shall be stated clearly in the published Conditions of Entry.

19. Commercial Sponsorship

Ordinary private commercial sponsorship shall be permitted subject to normal EPF advertising regulations.

However, a Neutral Athlete shall not display sponsorship connected to:

- the Russian or Belarusian government;
- a state ministry or governmental agency;
- the Russian or Belarusian National Olympic Committee;
- the suspended national federation; or
- a company determined to be state-controlled where that sponsorship relates specifically to the athlete's participation in the event.

EPF may require reasonable evidence concerning the source of sponsorship where necessary.

20. Political Expression

This Policy is intended to ensure sporting neutrality rather than regulate an athlete's personal beliefs.

However, no participant may use:

- competition clothing;
 - equipment;
 - accreditation;
 - interviews conducted in an official competition area;
 - podium ceremonies;
 - official photographs; or
 - other EPF-controlled platforms
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to express support for military action or display prohibited national, military or war-related propaganda.

EPF's ordinary rules regarding political, discriminatory, threatening or inflammatory conduct shall continue to apply equally to all participants.

21. Pre-Competition Equipment Check

Tournament officials may inspect clothing and equipment before a Neutral Athlete's first match.

Where an inadvertent prohibited marking is identified, the normal first response shall be to require it to be:

- removed;
- covered;
- replaced; or
- otherwise made compliant.

The objective is compliance rather than punishment.

22. Breaches

Where a participant inadvertently breaches this Policy, EPF shall normally require immediate correction.

Where a participant:

- refuses to correct a breach;
- intentionally displays prohibited national symbols;
- repeatedly breaches the Policy; or
- deliberately misrepresents themselves as competing for Russia or Belarus,

the Tournament Director or Referee may prevent the participant from entering the court until the matter is corrected.

Serious or deliberate breaches may be referred for disciplinary action under EPF regulations and may result in:

- warning;
 - withdrawal of accreditation;
 - forfeiture;
 - disqualification; or
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- other proportionate disciplinary action.

Except where immediate action is necessary to preserve the integrity of the competition, disciplinary sanctions shall be subject to appropriate procedural fairness and any applicable EPF appeal procedure.

23. Equality of Sporting Treatment

Neutral Athlete status shall not affect:

- seeding;
- ranking;
- draw position;
- qualification;
- court allocation;
- prize money;
- trophies;
- medals;
- competition conditions; or
- access to normal player services.

Neutral Athletes shall receive the same sporting treatment as other eligible competitors.

The restriction relates solely to national representation and the conditions of neutral participation.

24. Interpretation

The purpose of this Policy is to permit an individual athlete to compete while making clear that the athlete is not participating as a representative of Russia or Belarus.

Where uncertainty arises, the guiding principle shall be:

The individual athlete may be visible; the suspended or excluded national representation may not.

The EPF Board or its authorised Tournament Director shall determine any question concerning the interpretation or application of this Policy.

25. Review

This Policy shall be reviewed whenever there is a material change in:

- IOC policy;
- ITF or other relevant international-sport neutral-athlete policy;
- sanctions affecting participation;
- the status of the Russian or Belarusian national sporting authorities; or
- applicable European or host-country law.

This structure follows the current tennis principle particularly closely: the ITF still confirms the Russian and Belarusian federation suspensions as of 8 May 2026, while its neutral-athlete rule permits individuals but prohibits national affiliation, national insignia/symbols, flags and anthems. (ITF Tennis) Wimbledon adds the declaration concerning neutrality, support for the invasion and relevant state funding. (Wimbledon) The detailed treatment of uniforms, support personnel, flags and ceremonies is strongly supported by the ITF's Olympic tennis neutral-athlete regulations. (ITF Tennis)

I would recommend one small but important refinement before EPF adopts it: do not describe this as a “ban on Russian players.” The Board resolution should expressly say that EPF is allowing eligible Russian and Belarusian individuals to compete, while temporarily removing national representation. That distinction makes the policy much easier to defend on sporting, governance and non-discrimination grounds.

Because EPF is a Luxembourg federation and the European Open is in Türkiye, I would also have the final policy checked against Luxembourg and host-country law before formal adoption.
